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Symposium on Television Violence Colloque sur la violence à la télévision

THREE MEASURES OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS
TELEVISION VIOLENCE*



*one of a series of papers prepared by the following
researchers:

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| David Balcon | Catherine Richards |
| Michèle Baril | Roger Richer |
| Normand Gamache | Susan Schachter |
| John Horvath | Janet Solberg |
| Diane Labrecque | Nigel Weir |
| James Mitchell | Mary Wilson |

Views expressed in these papers do not necessarily
reflect those of the Canadian Radio-Television
Commission

Donald Gordon Centre, Queens University, Kingston, Ont.

Canadian Radio-Television
Commission Conseil de la Radio-Télévision
Canadienne





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I. Public Attitudes Towards Television Violence:
Survey Data from the Report of Senate Special
Committee on Mass Media (1970).

The survey conducted for the Senate Special Committee on Mass Media asked respondents if they believed there to be too much violence contained in various media. The following are the data for television:

Per Cent Believing Television Contains Too Much Violence

| | % |
|------------------|----|
| TOTAL CANADA | 78 |
| British Columbia | 78 |
| Alberta | 82 |
| Saskatchewan | 82 |
| Manitoba | 84 |
| Ontario | 79 |
| Québec | 77 |
| New Brunswick | 78 |
| Nova Scotia | 76 |
| Newfoundland | 67 |

Note: This particular survey study is used here for exposition because of the special place it occupies in Canadian mass media research and because its relatively large sample size (2,254 respondents) permits valid breakdowns by Province. More recent surveys (e.g. those of the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion) with smaller samples indicate approximately the same level of public concern.

The exact questionnaire item which gave rise to these data was, in English, "Now think about the three media." (television, newspapers, radio) "In your opinion, do they talk too much about the following subjects: violence, sex, drug usage?" The item in French was phrased: "Pensez encore aux trois media." (Télévision, Journaux, Radio) "A votre avis, parlent-ils trop des sujets suivants: Violence, Sexe, Usage des Drogues?"

II. Public Attitudes Towards Television Violence: A classification of Letters Received From the Public by the Canadian Radio-Television Commission

A classification was made of the letters received from the general public by the Office of the Chairman, Canadian Radio-Television Commission from 1 January, 1975 to 31 March, 1975. The total number of letters received from the general public over this period was 532. (The large number of letters and representations from the regulated industry and other agencies of government were not included in this analysis.)

Of these 532 letters, 58.5% concerned such technical matters as poor reception of television and radio signals or general comments on Commission policies in such areas as alternate service, FM radio, and cable television undertakings.

The remainder of these 532 letters, 41.5%, related to radio and television programming. Of these letters concerning programming, the largest single category consisted of complaints about television violence; in this category were 54 letters, being 10.1% of the total. (The figure would be 11.0% if general complaints about violence in films and the arts were included.) The second largest category of letters, 8.1% of the total concerned charges of sensationalism or superficiality in news and public affairs programming.

III. Public Attitudes Towards Television Violence: An Analysis of Spontaneous Comments in BBM Bureau of Measurement "Diaries".

As part of a larger CRTC Research Branch study project, an analysis was made of the spontaneous viewer comments made about television in BBM Bureau of Measurement audience research "diaries". A sample of listener and viewer diaries from the Fall, 1974 audience survey was drawn, and the content of that section of the diaries which allow spontaneous comments was subjected to analysis. The sample consisted of 3070 diaries selected from six cities: Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Saint John, and Halifax.

Of the 3070 diaries, 46.1% contained no comments whatsoever on any subject, while 53.9% contained some comments. The diaries which contained some comments contained, altogether, 5098 separate comments referring to television. (Many respondents made more than one comment; the average number of comments per diary was 3.7). Of those 5098 comments 196 (3.8%) referred to television violence, almost invariably in a negative context. (A very small number of comments placed violence in a positive context). This could be seen as a measure of the relative salience of the issue in the total context of television; as a measure of relative salience against other television matters, it should be noted that comments relating to television advertising and television commercials were almost ten times as numerous.

